# THE NEWS LETTER

OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

L. IV, NO. 6 UNION COLLEGE : SCHENECTADY, N.Y. OCTOBER, 1942

U. OF PENNA. OCT 31 1947 BIOLOGICAL DEPT.

## e War and English

a recent broadcast, Dr. John Studebaker, Federal Commis-r of Education, spoke of the necessity of teaching English e men in college who will even-ly be in the armed forces. At same time he expressed the ght that some of the literature es now taught might have to et aside, for the moment, as uries". However, while he did ay so, it is probable that Dr. ebaker would agree that a ledge of great books ("luxu-" to some educators in peace as well as in war) does in-and encourage fighting men in midst of their military activi-especially men of the caliber r American boys who are go-from college halls into the ing forces of the nation.

e can hardly expect a soldier, ne, or sailor to charge the Japs rmans with a book of Shakes-'s plays in one hand and a y gun in the other. But mili-men, as a rule, do not fight y and every day. Consequent-e are not surprised to find that in strenuous campaigns sol-great and small, have packed k or two into their meager ge to refresh their minds and imulate their spiritual facul-amidst scenes that seem far ved from the civilized thought e which these soldiers have in times of peace. Alexander reat carried a copy of the with him on his campaigns t shared a dagger under his -bed pillow. Alexander fre-ly sent home for books and articularly fond, between bat-f reading the great tragedies schylus, Sophocles, and Eu-s.

oleon Bonaparte had a large uilt back of the dashboard in ur-wheeled campaign carriage it he carried, with his maps apers, a much thumbed copy cpherson's "Ossian". As Gen-Wolfe was rowed down the St. nce to his last battle before e, he expressed his sense of utility of earthly glory by g to his officers lines from Elegy.

sident Roosevelt's new chief ff, Admiral W. D. Leahy, said 39, when he addressed the ating class at Annapolis: "In ncient days, when I was a ipman, the final result of our med English course approxi-what we then called an ab-zero. We indulge in the hope our accomplishment in the the spoken and written word er, because I can assure you while proficiency in public ng in the Navy rarely pays dividends, except in per-atisfaction, skill in the use lish is one of the most valu-

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*Contributors to This Issue*

W. E. McPHEETERS, Lake Forest College
"A MEMBER IN UNIFORM"
STRANG LAWSON, Colgate University
DOUGLAS BEMENT, University of Washington
ROBERT D. WILLIAMS, State Teachers College, Superior, Wis.
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GELETT BURGESS
A. M. WITHERS, State Teachers College, Athens, W. Va.
CHRISTOPHER MORLEY
T. O. MABBOTT, Hunter College
MARY PARMENTER, Hollins College
JAMES M. MILLER, Waynesburg College

*Announcement of CEA Annual Meeting, Page 4*

*Among Contributors to the November Issue*

W. R. RICHARDSON, College of William and Mary
MARY A. HILL, Arizona State Teachers College, Flagstaff.
WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE, Emporia, Kan.
HENRY SEIDEL CANBY, Yale University
GERALDINE P. DILLA, University of Kansas City

## The Composition Student In War Time

What is the role of the Composition student in war time? We have found no positive and conclusive answer to this question as yet, but we have been fumbling our way toward an answer for six months.

There are several activities in which we are now participating. A great deal of this is voluntary work on the part of composition students but in some instances we allow them credit in their writing courses. Our activities may be briefly summed up as follows:

(1) Writing scripts to meet special local and national needs. For example, seven scripts were written, designed to enlist civilians as air raid wardens. A local dramatic group has had one of these plays "on tour" in Seattle for some months and there are more future bookings. The play is being presented before enthusiastic audiences in high schools, grade schools, community centers, etc. Plays are also being written for the salvage campaign.

(2) Plays which can be presented by the soldiers themselves in the various camps and service men's clubs. We have found that these must be short, making use of pantomime as much as possible because there are few opportunities for rehearsals, and the soldiers themselves are frequently evacuated without notice. A certain other type of play designed for soldiers is presented by men who are hospitalized. A number of men in the hospitals are minor psychiatric cases and frequently have nothing to occupy their minds during the entire day. Among all our soldiers and sailors there are men with admirable background for producing and acting. I talked just the other day with a former Hollywood director whose commander had had the good sense to assign him, although he was only a private, to special duty in the entertainment field.

(3) Radio scripts for use by municipal and state defense councils. In most of the larger cities and in some of the smaller towns there are such local or state agencies, and they are without question eager for plays and radio sketches.

(4) Service men's clubs. This is a very particularized problem since it involves writing continuity for a variety show. The task is usually one of hitting upon a theme and then letting the Master of Ceremonies read from a script into a public address system. One of the difficulties here is that since most of the talent is volunteered, the participators do not always, alas, take their obligations too seriously. Half of the acts may fail to appear, and we have had to fill in with talent volunteered by the soldier audience.

At the outset we had tremendous difficulty in trying to coordinate the various agencies in the city, all of them independent of one another. That difficulty has fortunately been solved by our own Municipal Defense Council, which is setting up a general clearing house for all the material which is written in the city. It is rather a pathetic commentary on off-campus writers to note that practically all the material which is clearing through this new agency is prepared by students in Composition and Creative Writing.

I should be very glad to furnish any information which I can to any C.E.A. members who wish to write to me. By way of general advice in procedure, I would say:

(1) Get in touch with your local municipal or state defense council and find out the needs and the facilities for meeting them.

(2) If there is a camp nearby, try to obtain permission to visit it with the idea of noting audience reactions to certain types of material. In general, the scripts should be light and amusing rather than sombre. The more subtle type of humor is usually lost unless the audience is largely officers.

(3) It would be wise to get in touch with Mrs. Selma Hirsh, Special Assistant, Section of Volunteer Talents, Office of Civilian Defense, Washington, D.C. She is very anxious to act as a clearing house, as she has the facilities for mimeographing good material and sending it to the camps.

Douglas Bement,
University of Washington.

## What Can We Tell Them?

The "two scandals of criticism" that Mr. Theodore Morrison pointed out in Chap Book III last April should not seem so very scandalous to students of criticism or to the critics themselves.

The former are all-too-well aware that the heavy artillery of past centuries has been silenced by the years; the latter, in spite of the constant cocksureness of their weekly, monthly, or more widely spaced comments, know well enough that time alone is the judge and that even Time has a disconcerting habit of shifting his ground.

But there are many—the reading public and especially students—who, in their naivete, are shocked to learn that final authority rests nowhere, not even with a favorite professor, whose persuasive eloquence and seeming vast experience compare most advantageously with what their secondary school teachers possessed.

Even the public, however, has long suspected that value-judgments, as Mr. Morrison reminds us, have little authority. But it may be a surprise to learn that description of a work of art (said many years ago by Henry Seidel Canby to be the principal function of the critic) is almost equally uncertain. Yet a moment's reflection should reveal how difficult it is to agree on what the thing in itself really is when, to quote Mr. Morrison, "the thing to be seen is a product of sensibility, apprehensible only by means of sensibility."

Difficult indeed, and perhaps impossible! But if some of us would have our disquietude relieved, we might observe that matters political, social, and economic, when judged qualitatively—which is the kind of description that Mr. Morrison has principally in mind—and, indeed, quantitatively, yield some of the heartiest of disagreements. What is WPA, Mr. Hayakawa asks, insurance or grudging charity? — and the battle is on. Perhaps such questions should be answered without emotion—that is, without sensibility—but they are not.

And we might even realize that those who weigh and analyze and otherwise observe the phenomena of the physical world are increasingly conscious of the subjectivity of their descriptions. In the choice of an experiment and in the interpretation of the results lies ample room for disagreement. And to top it all come the theories of relativity and quantum mechanics!

Revealing such matters to students need not infect them with that enervating relativism which, it is charged, has left the young incapable of action, of espousing any cause, of responding to any ap-

(Continued on Page 4)

1 1942

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## THE NEWS LETTER

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Membership in the College English Association, including THE NEWS LETTER, $2.00 a year. Subscription for Libraries, $1.50.


## Editorial

A little more than a year ago CEA members indicated by formal written ballot their desire to continue as an independent organization, retaining, however, the pleasant and profitable relationship to the MLA, which offered us a place in its published programs and hospitality at its annual meetings. This is similar to the arrangement with the French and German and Italian groups. Out of several hundred ballots received from our members there were, in fact, only 12 which expressed the desire for a merger with either one of the older organizations. Your secretary, therefore, has a definite mandate until a changed attitude on the part of the membership is indicated.

This year the CEA has again been urged to combine its annual meeting with that of the College Section of the National Council of English Teachers and the invitation has again been declined, with expressions of our sincere desire to collaborate with them in any other way which may be to the advantage of our teaching profession, or help to accomplish the purposes which animate both organizations. Our reasons for the refusal seem obvious. Our association is very young; its identity is not yet fully defined, even among its own members. Our annual meeting is the one time in the year when many of us can come together to get acquainted and talk shop and attend to organization business. The submerging of our identity at such a time would apparently not be in accord with the desires of the membership as a whole. But if at any time it seems advisable to any local group anywhere in the country to bring this question again to a vote, that group has only to request another ballot.

Out of a class of 24 freshmen three assure us that they have read "Alice in Wonderland." One other says cheerfully that he has heard of the book from a high school teacher, who described it as a political satire written in the Victorian period and containing many often-quoted lines.

We realize that we are getting old. If only we could go to high school again, there is much that we might learn. Probably the Mad Hatter at the tea-party was really Disraeli at a cabinet meeting; but who were the March Hare and the White Knight; and what notable figures were represented by the Walrus and the Carpenter?

Ruskin, when he made out his list of books which every cultivated Englishman should know, put Lear's Nonsense Books near the head of the list. Perhaps that is because he knew that they were full of subtle comment upon the social and political events of his time. But as for ourselves we should prefer to teach our students that Edward Lear and Louis Carroll were prophets in their day, rather than satirists. Interpreted in such fashion, the "Alice" books can yield far more than Mother Shipton ever dreamed. Unquestionably the trial of the Knave of Hearts foretold the great Dreyfuss case. Then consider Humpty Dumpty, for instance as Mussolini, and no further proof is necessary.

## Letters More or Less Personal

Dear Editor:

I've always hankered to write a textbook of English—not literature exactly, let's say a textbook of English **Feeling**—and now by some unpremeditated savagery I seem to have done it in the form of a Novel —though I can't imagine anything more damaging to get round and the publishers would probably sue me if they heard me say so.

But the deuce and devil of it is, the hero of the novel (which I delivered to the publisher just three days ago) I now perceive is really the English Language. What will be your agitation when I admit that my most expressive character is an Englishman in the U.S. — at an imaginary college called Patapsco, in the imaginary city of Chesapeake—who has a unique job—he is an Englishman teaching "English". (Imagine!) And it is the grim and sober truth that often in the depths of woe I have thought secretly of the C.E.A. and said to myself: Well they will like this book even if nobody else does.

It's very agitating how one's hero keeps changing on one; comes one cranking in as You-Know-Who said. At first I thought it was the Atlantic Ocean; then I thought it was the Year 1900; then I thought it was the Susquehanna River (as imagined by S. T. Coleridge); and finally I have discovered (but hope the bookbuying public won't) it's really the English Language — in speech rather than in writing.

And my attendant magi through a year of the hardest work I ever mumbled at were Coleridge, Prospero, Uncle Remus, and an occasional snoot from Sherlock Holmes.

Did you notice that the 70th birthday of the most exquisite writer of our lifetime—Max Beerbohm—passed entirely unremarked by our press? I wrote twice to an editor of the N. Y. Times to let him know it was coming, but he paid me — the supreme tribute, maybe —silence. I wonder whether I was comparatively haywire in thinking (as I still do) that in the long perspective and for the honor of the English Word the 70th birthday of Max Beerbohm was just as considerable as the Raid on Dieppe or Defense of Stalingrad. Max also put an umbrella of thought and feeling over the narrow seas of barbarism.

Now I feel just started on writing you a letter, but . . . Greetings to the C.E.A., and maybe they will feel heartened to know that a college English prof has at last had his infinitive split in public print—(but not until November).

Forgive the vast thick pants, inherited from Coleridge.

Christopher Morley.

Dear Editor:

The anonymous critic who dislikes Thoreau brings to my mind a problem that faces all English teachers. How should we treat a widely praised book or author we find personally distasteful? One may be conventional and insincere —and probably the students will see it. Or one may indulge in a bit of amusing "tomahawk" criticism, which has the disadvantage of the teacher's authority spoiling something for the pupil.

To me the chief end of teaching literature is to help the pupil get what is best for him from books. Improvement of the exactness and clarity of the student's own thought and expression is a derivative and secondary product of this. Intellectual honesty is absolutely requisite for all. The honest way is the best; I tell my students what I feel, briefly, and advise them to read at least one favorable article on the subject, make what decision they like, and we pass on to something more profitable.

If Saintsbury disliked Byron, and Poe could see nothing in Burns, how can any teacher be expected to delight in every great author? I make myself see **why** Thoreau and Hardy are praised, but I do not like them, and I am sure it is better for me to be very brief in discussing them. Of course if one dislikes a large proportion of the classics he had better quit teaching literature, but a few idiosyncratic judgments are normal.

T. O. Mabbott,
Hunter College
of the City of New York.

Dear Editor:

By strange chance, the May issue of the "News Letter" did reach me, and I read it with more than usual pleasure. The letters (apparently requested) from the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Navy were kind, and endorsed the teaching of correct and precise English—as might be expected. But could we not use our energy and our letterheads toward more definite ends than requesting statements?

Teachers of English and graduate students are now being drafted at a rapid rate. They cannot be labelled as easily as mechanics or radio operators or teachers of other subjects, and anyone not an English teacher can be pardoned for not knowing quite what they are good for in the war effort. Would it not be well for our profession to list some of its specific uses and bring them to the attention of outsiders, as well as make general statements about the cultural value of English? It seems that we, who pride ourselves on clear expression, have done rather less well than other university faculties in explaining our uses.

I list briefly a few possible lines of work for English teachers; there are certainly more.

1. Almost all of us are trained in Germanic philology. We could rapidly master Norwegian, Icelandic, or any other needed Germanic tongue. By extension, owing to our linguistic training, we could work rapidly into the study of modern Oriental languages which is now getting under way.

2. In the last war philologists did valuable work in cryptography and cryptanalysis.

3. We have read countless themes, concerning ourselves with the nuances as well as the abuses of language. This should develop a keenness useful in censorship.

4. With our varied work we have had to master a number of teaching methods. This experience could be applied to teaching whatever practical subjects the armed forces wish taught.

These are tentative suggestions. Could we not add a few more, and display the list prominently?

Sincerely yours,
A CEA Member in Uniform.


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**Change in Publishers**

**THE RONALD PRESS COMPANY recently acquired the College Textbooks of THOMAS NELSON AND SONS. The College Caravan listed above is one of these books.**

**Write for further information on this and other texts in English.**

**THE RONALD PRESS COMPANY**
**15 East 26th Street, New York, N.Y.**

## Long vs. Short

My dear Editor:

I liked Mr. Burgess' chap book on short words very much, but you must know that it is marred by the fact that he does not seem to know how words came to be.

First words were long words, not short words. The words of birds and beasts are long and are made up of many tones and clicks. And men who look and live most like beasts have few words which are not made up of four or five parts. Look at the words of the black men and the red men all over the world.

Short words are old words with the soft parts worn off. The words he cites like "start", "stop", "end", "help", and the rest were not so short once as they are now. When men used stone tools, their words were big and rough like their tools. When these words first sailed on the sea they had forms like "stertoz", "stoppon", "andjojan", and "helpan".

The way a child learns to talk shows the same thing. When he starts he makes sounds that seem to have many parts and no end. What we call "goo" may be a long song though we pay heed to but one part of that song. In a while the child too learns that a part of this song will get him what he wants. But words like "mumumumu", "dadadada", and "umnumnumnumn" come long ere words like "ma", "dad", and "good". My girl's first word was "munanamunanamunana" for the fruit on whose skin one slips, and my boy's was "wheredego". We took the boy's sounds to mean "where did it go" but he felt it as one word and used it to mean "give to me", "find for me" or some vague want.

I do not mean that we do not at times make new long words out of old short ones, but these long words are like houses made of sand. The sand had first to be made of rock.

I got this point of view from O.J. who writes in the book of all round thought and art which was made in the land to which Brute came, the "Enc. Brit."

Robert D. Williams,
State Teachers College,
Superior, Wisconsin.

—o—

Dear Mr. Williams:

The editor has sent me your letter (published in the May "News Letter") criticizing my statement that our first words were short words, which I should like to answer briefly although pages could be written on this subject.

The origin of Language, as you must know, is a highly controversial subject. It is obvious that nothing can be proved; but there have been many different hypotheses advanced. One can therefore take one's choice as to which of them seems most rational and probable.

In the effort to get to the roots of the subject Franke, Garner, Boutan, Learned, Yerkes, Furness and Schmidt, and especially Georg Schwidetzky made painstaking studies of the speech of apes, in particular of the chimpanzees. Some even made vocabularies. The speech of hens, wolves, horses and amphibians have been studied. Von Frisch, studying bees, assigned the origin of speech to air-breathing, the animal's need of oxygen, and even believed that fish were not dumb.

Max Muller named the two main theories of his time the Bow-wow (or onomatopoeia method) and the Pooh-pooh theory (exclamatory impulse). There is also the "gesture" theory of Sir Richard Paget, and the "love" theory of Otto Jesperson, who believed speech arose from play, in a sort of sing-song use of words.

I have found in none of these authorities any indication that long words preceded short ones. My statement of the case seems as rational as any.

You cite certain cut-down Anglo-Saxon words, such as "helpan" and "help". But this is a very advanced stage of the language. We have to go back several million years before we get root-origins. It still seems to me self-evident that our first words were words of emotion, and short words still mainly are.

With regard to the speech of your child, I admit the facts but doubt your conclusions which, to me, are illogical.

However, I'm glad you liked my article. The rest doesn't so much matter.

Yours sincerely,
Gelett Burgess.

—o—

Dear Mr. Burgess:

Please accept my apologies for the rudeness of my criticism of your Chap Book. It was the fault of the short words which I affected. I am not skillful enough with short words to imitate the genial polysyllabic obfuscations of diplomacy.

I do, however, wish to analyze a little further some of the sources of our disagreement. In the first place we seem to disagree with regard to the interpretation of the authorities. I admit, of course, that the origin of language is an even more controversial subject than the origin of man, but Jespersen's theory seems to me to harmonize far more of the facts than any other. If this theory does not obviously suggest to you that long words preceded short words, it is simply an example of how the same words may suggest to two different people entirely different ideas. I would like also to refer you to Zipf's "The Psycho-Biology of Language".

With regard to such Old English words as "helpan" I had no idea of citing them as primitive words, but simply as more primitive than the modern "help". At the time "help" was competing with the French "aid" (one, by the way, of the hundreds of short words contributed to English by the Normans) it was longer than it is today. And while I cannot trace this word back to Sanskrit, I have no doubt that it was much longer then than it was in 1250.

I agree with you that first words were words of emotion, I cannot think of them as short. Emotion is proverbially either wordless or polysyllabic. It is the rare man who under stress of emotion contents himself with one syllable. The savage never does so.

Of course part of our difference concerns the definition of the word "word". I could go into this, but I have written too much already. Self justification, like jealousy, mocks the meat it feeds on, and I would rather make friends.

I cannot but be glad that my little burst provoked your reply, and I wish you many further years of fruitfulness.

Yours sincerely,
Robert D. Williams.

P.S.—My children still read and enjoy and read the Goop Book.

—o—

Dear Mr. Williams:

Thank you for your letter, the letter of a gentleman and a scholar. I'll make only one riposte. I thought my piece pretty nearly proved that words of emotion were usually short words. When the house is on fire, or you are yourself with a gal, whom you hate and despise, do you use long words? I don't. I say "Damn you!" I have a short essay by Walter Raleigh entirely in words of six syllables, but it shows little emotion.

But when you cite as authority the "proverbial" opinion, I'm afraid we are getting, as most English professors do, nowadays, into Semantics, and I can't follow you.

The worst thing about any discussion like this is, I find, that one (meaning me) is too apt to become convinced and find himself swept off his little island of egoism, floating about in other people's opinions. But anyway, I am too lightly armed to venture into a duel with a person who pursues words into the Sanskrit. I certainly am not worthy of your steel. And so back to the quiet life and places where your gal thinks you are wonderful and you don't have to prove it.

To hold any opinion I hold is intellectual suicide. I try to keep up a rough trial balance, however, but always hold the books open for auditing when more facts come in. The main thing is to know what statements are susceptible of proof, and what aren't. I heard Davis, the co-ordinator or chief of something in Labor say yesterday, "Men cannot disagree about a fact. They can only be ignorant of it." We are all ignorant of the origin of language, so why argue about it? Especially when you're so fond of savages.

Now we'll begin again. Where can I find a list of ALL rhetorical terms and figures of speech, from Allegory to Zeugma, and including Antonomasis, Catastasis, Ecphonesis, Epidorthosis, Epitrochasmus, Hendiais, Hypotyposis, Pretermission, Procatalepsis, Synizesis . . . et alios?

Yours continually,
Gelett Burgess.

—o—

## Regional Meeting At Natural Bridge

Undismayed by the realities of mileage as measured in gasoline and rubber, twenty-three members of the regional branch of Virginia, West Virginia and North Carolina met on April 18 at Natural Bridge, Virginia.

In charming and leisurely surroundings they heard Dr. Marie White (Mrs. Newman Ivey White) of Duke University discuss "Some Teachers I Have Known," one of her points being that it is now the hard, dry light of the disciplined disciplinarians which illumines their disciples, not the bright torches of the once more brilliant lecturers, who knew and told all. Next, under the chairmanship of the vice-president, they discussed certain necessary (or likely) wartime changes to be expected in the content and conduct of English courses, especially during the freshman and sophomore years, which may be the only two which most students will now devote to English. They agreed, on the whole, that it should no longer be up to the English department to give a general "orientation" course. They agreed, too, that they were not disposed merely to "change omnibuses" for freshman textbooks; while glad enough to leave the once "modern" omnibuses of the 1930's, now shoddy enough, they are not unanimously booked on the new "Democracy omnibuses" the publishers are preparing. At least, most members felt they would do better to teach classics of one sort or another in both freshman composition and sophomore literature, or in whatever may result from reorganizing these basic courses, than to try to "teach" Democracy as a sort of belated propaganda. Democracy, to be taught, must be lived; and it is not the exclusive responsibility of the English department.

At the luncheon meeting, the president introduced Dr. Fletcher Collins, Jr., of Elon College. His listeners felt that Mr. Collins, singing ballads and telling tales to his students and listening to theirs, has something to do not only with "orientation" and with "Democracy" but with the creating and preserving of the classics.

The outgoing officers were: president, William Blackburn of Duke University; vice-president, Fraser Neimann of William and Mary; secretary-treasurer, Mary Parmenter of Hollins. The incoming ones are: president, Joseph L. Vaughan of the University of Virginia; vice-president, William P. Cumming of Davidson College; secretary-treasurer, Mary Dee Long of Sweet Briar College.

Mary Parmenter,
Hollins College.

*Off to a good start!*

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FOURTH ANNUAL MEETING
of the
COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION
Hotel Astor, New York City
December 28 and 29, 1942
General Theme: The Undergraduate English Classroom During This War, and After.

★

MONDAY, DEC. 28—3:30 P.M.
Hotel Astor
A Panel Discussion: Subject and Participants to be announced.
5:30 P.M. Business meeting.
7:00 P.M. Annual Dinner, Hotel Edison.
Speakers: President Howard Lowry and Mr. Christopher Morley.
Chairman: Secretary Burges Johnson.

★

TUESDAY, DEC. 29—10 A.M.
Hotel Astor
Subject and Speakers: To be announced.

★

Registration Monday at entrance to meeting hall.
Registration Tuesday morning with MLA registrants.
Non-members are welcome at both meetings and the dinner. Please notify Miss Wyman by postcard if you plan to attend the dinner.
Program Committee:
Chairman, Strang Lawson, Colgate Univ.; Scully Bradley, Univ. of Pennsylvania; Ernest E. Leisy, Southern Methodist Univ.; John Abbot Clark, Michigan State College; Atwood H. Townsend, New York Univ.
Local Committee:
Chairman, Mary A. Wyman, Hunter College; Donald L. Clark, Columbia Univ.; Margaret Bryant, Brooklyn College; Martin J. Freeman, Hunter College; Margaret Schlauch, New York Univ.

—o—

## What Can We Tell Them?

(Continued from Page 1)

peal for justice, liberty, truth, decency. Certainly many teachers will testify to the firmness with which students hold to some beliefs, both aesthetic and not, many of which have been inculcated in the plastic period by their first professor, or, perhaps, by their latest. Undergraduate insularity has shocked many of us, and it will do no harm to reveal, as Mr. Morrison proposes, the varying standards by which art has been judged in past ages.

For we can assert positively that there is a unity in works of art and that a search for it should not be given over. Though a blind man may search in vain in a cellar for a black cat, his ill success is no proof that the cat is not there; nor need we assume that he cannot apprehend something of the cat if it is there. Probably it is, or he would not have started searching (which is not a begging of the question, for he felt that something was there). Even impressionism, as Philo Buck has pointed out, implies the unity of a common humanity: we feel that something is there and we wish to communicate what we can apprehend of it to sympathetic sensibilities. Certainly Anatole France did not subside into that silence which is the end point of nihilistic impressionism. Perhaps this common humanity will not include all the two billion inhabitants of our tragically divided globe, but our growing awareness of foreign and exotic art—Chinese, Japanese, Amerindian, African — suggests that a start may have been made in that direction. Furthermore, as Mr. Morrison also points out, we tend to coalesce into groups. Perhaps, if peace comes again, groups can once more learn to practise that tolerance for each other that once we fondly hoped was a humane principle. Certainly Gleichshaltung is not the way by which we shall achieve unity, and one can hold to that as a fundamental.

For tolerance is a fundamental humane quality—tolerance not for deceit, hypocrisy, expediency, and downright lying but for what is sincere—tolerance for earnest attempts to learn the truth as clearly as in us lies. And these qualities, even more than artistic skill, are matters about which the teacher of literature can be positive. Granted that the human mind, limited in its perceptions, can never learn the absolute, it can and should endeavor to approach it; and sensibility of sincere attempts to do so is a touchstone such as Mr. Morrison wishes we might have to try the latest work of literature.

Space does not here permit seriously to make such a trial, but one recent novel may be cited—"For Whom The Bell Tolls". In spite of what the squeamish have thought to be too much attention to erotic episodes, that novel attests to the importance of tolerance and sincerity; it is an honest and sincere tribute to humane qualities and an equally sincere indictment of humanity's opposing qualities, especially as revealed in totalitarianism. No matter how alluring dictatorship may be when judged pragmatically, a teacher of literature can confidently assert: "Here is a great book; it has sincerely attempted to convey truth to the reader." Compare it, for instance with Prokosch's "The Seven Who Fled," and the conclusion is inescapable.

At best we shall always have an imperfect knowledge of what truth is, but as W. H. Auden has recently written:

> We canot live without believing certain values to be absolute. These values exist, though our knowledge of them is always imperfect, distorted by the limitations of our historical position and our personal character. However, if but only we realize this, our knowledge can improve. . . . To deny to those who are in fact the elite of their age the right to impose their authority by force, does not deny their obligation to educate and persuade. Responsibility is in direct proportion to capacity.

Cornell M. Dowlin,
Univ. of Pennsylvania.

## Weather Forecast

When men's colleges open for the Fall term, organized higher education will be disorganized. Curriculum, student body, and faculty will be uncertain. We shall open as institutions committed half to peace-education and half to war. Soon after the opening, the armed forces may be ready with plans to extend the use of colleges for specialized pre-induction training. Educators must be prepared, says General Somervell, for "the temporary side-tracking of non-war objectives, or even the temporary scrapping of peace-time courses". Colleges will begin the session with many students below draft age. Soon thereafter the Selective Service Act will probably be amended to lower the age of liability to 18. The educational committee of the War Manpower Commission has stated that "the exigencies of the war do not make it possible to assure any student that he will be permitted to remain in the institution for any specified time". Accelerated depletion of male teaching staffs will be ensured by volunteering, by draft boards, and government bureaus.

Problems of college departments teaching war-useful subjects will be well defined. The tasks given them by the war services will be hard but specific. In mathematics, physics, chemistry and other sciences the shift from peace to war will be one of application only, not of purpose or method. Motivations of students in these subjects will be strong, and the importance of the teacher's contribution apparent. Morale should be high.

English departments, however, will become war casualties. As anxious as others to serve the common good in an hour of peril, they will acknowledge that they cover an area of "non-war objectives" and "peace time courses." which cannot without corruption be converted to war aims. There will still be demand for instruction in writing reading, and speaking, as essential equipment of commissioned personnel. Specialists sent by the army to colleges for training may also be taught sub-freshman composition. But the "English major" will have few registrants at the beginning of the year, and will presently be abandoned: there would be no point in starting on a sequence of courses that cannot possibly be completed, and two years will be the maximum expectancy of college life. This will worry what is left of the English departments. As custodians of some of the values we fight for, they will wonder if we can afford, like our enemies, an exclusively military education, since we propose not only to fight a good fight but to make a good peace. But as Hitler turns from the Volga to other fronts they will acquiesce in the need to save our skins first. Hoping to salvage something for the current college generation, they will drop specialized courses and try to find room in the war curriculum for popular courses in literature calculated to promote good reading for relaxation and delight.

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## Teaching From The Ground Up

(Excerpts from a talk by Dr. Fletcher Collins, Jr., of Elon College, at the meeting of the regional—Va., W. Va., N. C.—branch of the CEA.)

In spite of all the categories of our general English courses, the basic forms of English and American literature remain what they have always been: song and story, or verse and narrative. These forms are basic because they are the forms of folk expression in the medium of language; they are not basic merely because of academic sanctions, often in spite of academic sanctions in other directions.

I am suggesting that the relation of folk literature to professionally written literature is a fundamentally important relation, and one which is seldom made by teachers of English.

Now I believe it could be demonstrated that every good literary artist is mainly engaged in making his interpretation of folk material, that this relationship is true for almost all poetry, story, and drama which is healthy, not solely the result of neurotic introspection and peripheral musings. The situation is thus the reverse of our graduate school impression of it: the traditional repertory of folk themes, lyric and narrative, is the basically important literature, while the professional writer in any age is important only as he freshly interprets this basic literature for himself and his contemporaries. At least that is what Chaucer and Shakespeare and Milton do, time and again.

This relationship has been obscured for us by our own temporal limitations. We are skilled mainly in the written, printed word; folk literature is not written or read, but spoken or sung. There is the correlative limitation, that in spite of the fact that English lyric poetry until the Seventeenth Century was usually sung, and that folk poetry has always been sung, we English teachers can't sing worth a bean, or at least don't try. And so we miss out on the experience of centuries of English poetry, and all ballads and folk-songs. And so therefore do our students.

It was a great misfortune that the teaching of English literature began only after melody had professionally diverged from poetic language. Vergil's "Aeneid" was sung in the Middle Aegs, and we have proof that all lyric and dramatic poetry in classic Greece was sung, but by the time the English humanists got ahold of Greek and Latin literature, the melodic element in these literatures had been discarded. The teaching of dead-language literatures in Renaissance England was thus already archaic and deficient before English literature came into the curriculum, yet pattern for the teaching of any literature, dead or alive, had been set, and was not altered by actual conditions in Renaissance poetry. It is a curious fact that had the same young, compleat gentlemen who were taught, in the sixteenth-century Merchant-Taylor school in London, to sing and to compose songs, also been offered courses in the English literature which they were in fact creating, you and I today would find our teaching equipment much more adequate to cope with the bulk of English—and some American—literature. Instead, study was one thing, creation quite another.

There is every reason why college English teachers in America today should attempt to remedy—first in themselves, then in their students, and finally in the formal curriculum—these major deficiencies. The best reason for supplying these deficiencies is that in so doing we not only make available and understandable the repertory of English and American sung-literature, but we democratize our teaching, we come down from a sterile Parnassus to the place where our students live, to the folk literature of our students who are the folk. I hasten to add that all students are the folk, whether of urban background in a large university or farm kids in a Southern church college. All young people bring to college a repertory of experiences in language: songs they have been singing in family and tavern, stories they have been telling in bull sessions or on Sunday afternoons when the kinfolks dropped in. Students who register for our college English classes have developed through family and friends a large repertory of songs and stories which were not learned from books. This repertory is an essential part of our students, and represents their traditional literary culture. Yet we English teachers are seldom even aware of these reportories, and even less fequently base our English teaching upon them. I have observed the feeling of surprise, relief, and satisfaction with which my own students have greeted my sober recognition of these repertories as literature and as a solid foundation for further literary expeience. The pooling of these repertories is usually an early development in Freshman English classes at Elon College, and the results are in terms of acceptance and understanding, personal possession, of the literature presented for study. The frustrated feeling that literature is something far off, like Parnassus, can be replaced by a feeling of passionate possession, if only we English teachers meet the student-folks where they live, with relations thereby established between "popular" literature and "college" literature. "Beginning where the student is" means in his cultural education beginning with whatever artistic experience he has had in his family, in his community, and—theoretically—in his earlier English courses.

By thus democratizing our teaching we are obviously not merely prostituting our literature and our own literary tastes. We are making our literature functional in the lives of our students, a purpose which I assume is our common purpose. We miss our chief opportunity as English teachers if we fail in this purpse through our own deficient training or specialized experience. Mass education at the college level remains aristocratic, our problem and our students democratic. I suggest the realignment of folk literature and professional literature as one solution to the problem. That would be teaching from the ground up.

## Brief Observations On Frost and Stephens

1.

In a poet so markedly individual as Robert Frost, an instance of unconscious reminiscence (or amazing coincidence) has interest, as anything concerning a man of Mr. Frost's stature is bound to have. I would point two lines from "The Wind and the Rain" ("A Witness Tree", N.Y.: Holt, 1942):

> The many deaths one must have died
> Before he came to meet his own!

In comparison, one recalls No. XV of W. E. Henley's "Rhymes and Rhythms" ("Poems", N.Y.: Scribner's, 1898):

> So many are the deaths we die
> Before we can be dead indeed.

2.

It is sad to find inconsistency and imperfection where one had remembered only seeming perfection. In a recent rereading of James Stephens' swift and tender and wholly lovely "Deirdre" (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1923), I became aware of the following minor slips, which I do not list in order to be picayune, but because correction would remove flaws from a work of art too haunting to make flaws easily bearable.

a) In Chap. VII, Bk. 1, Lavarcham gives Deirdre's age (just after Maeve's defection) as "Sixteen years and a few months" (p. 50); Chap. IX( Bk. I, gives Deirdre's age before coming on the sons of Uisneac as sixteen; the succeeding chapter makes the girl "almost a full sixteen years" (p. 72) on meeting the boys.

b) On page 105 we are told Lavarcham "perceived at a glance that Deirdre was in a very excited condition indeed," while on page 107 we read: "Deirdre was indeed excited, but Lavarcham had not the slightest perception of this: nor was it visible."

c) The "Cuchulain" of page 46 becomes "Cuchulinn" on page 70 and later—a confusion to readers unaware of the legitimacy of both spellings, and a change involving annoying inconsistence from the artistic point of view. Incidentally, Lavarcham's name is spelled with an "e" on pages 119 and 124.

d) There is a jarring error in pronoun-preference on page 141: ". . . for no person can either hope or fear until they know . . ."

e) In view of the fact that the original Deirdre story seems likely to have antedated St. Patric's coming to Ireland by at least two or three centuries, Naoise's "God pity the man" (p. 230)—in contrast to Ardan's "The gods be praised" (p. 231)—suggests the anachronistic.

George Brandon Saul,
University of Connecticut.

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## The War and English

(Continued from Page 1)

able of all the accomplishments that can be possessed by an officer of the Navy."

This address of Admiral Leahy is quoted by Capt. Leland P. Lovette, now the efficient head of the publicity department of the navy, in his recent book "School of the Sea". In this book Capt. Lovette tells of the great improvement that has been made in the teaching of English at Annapolis, especially under the leadership of the late Dr. C. Alphonso Smith, and adds: "This fact (the importance of English stressed by Admiral Leahy) has been recognized since World War days, and progressive improvement has been made in a department that for so long took a minor role. . . . Considerable attention is given to composition and literature, with emphasis on expression of thought." The importance of English, both composition and literature, has been equally recognized at West Point.

It seems agreed that training in English is important for soldiers and sailors. What about those new knights of modern warfare, the airmen? It is interesting to note what went into the making of the first British ace of this war—Cobber Kain, the New Zealander, who shot down twenty-five Nazi planes before an accident to his Hurricane ended his life. According to Noel Monks, his friend and biographer, in "Squadrons Up!", Cobber Kain spent two years in England training to be an R.A.F. pilot. The subjects he studied were aerodynamics, mechanics, maths, mechanical drawing, the construction of engines, airmanship, air navigation, advanced navigation, wireless telegraphy, armament, flight routine, signals, law, meteorology, the workings of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, world history, AND English. These comprised his complete course of study as a cadet in the R.A.F. school.

English won't win the war, but it has a vital part in training the fighting men—for the war today, for the peace that will follow.

W. E. McPheeters,
Lake Forest College.

## A Fraternal Warning To Professors of English

A strong and timely paper by Leonard Koester, "The Weakest Spot in Our National Armor," ("School and Society", March 28, 1942), shows how the United States is lagging behind other great nations in the matter of learning outside languages, and how this fact betokens a military weakness, as well as impairment of facilities for collaboration with foreign countries, in war or peace.

The Germans, Japanese, and Russians are successful in their mass assaults on foreign languages, not alone from the encouragement to that end from their leaders, but more particularly because of the preliminary mastery of their own tongues. Over here we have largely eliminated the basic-for-English study of Latin, substituting an extravagant "functionalism" which has gone far to deprive our native speech of its essential juices and tougher fibers, until now the average student is halted dead in his tracks as far as linguistic conquests are concerned.

Occasionally, when some one is reminded that Latin is good for English, a warm response comes in words like "Yes, lots of our words are derived from Latin." Such a statement of course tells a very small part of the total story. Latin brings associations, familiarities, habits into English which are indispensable, and which nothing else brings so abundantly or so well—until good English becomes to the individual a thing of inspiring beauty as well as of mortal necessity.

It is of course evident that in a time like this arguments for a return to English-getting by the complete and solid method have small prospects of securing attention; even if they do, such attention comes too late for immediate effect. Nevertheless there may be some utility in observations like these even now, if they can help to persuade departments of English to give more realistic recognition to the sources and processes from which English derives, and to make doubly sure of some linguistic ripeness on the part of students before opening to them literary courses futile without it.

It is a curious state of things which we daily behold; the leaders of English in the graduate schools all regarding the essentiality of foreign languages (especially Latin) for English as elementary and obvious ,while some undergraduate college professors, some editors of English-language journals, probably most of the secondary-school English teachers, and certainly most of the professional educators look upon language interdependencies as not greatly important. And what makes matters worse is that the graduate professors as a body are either unaware of the parlous state of English in the country at large, or are too complacently satisfied in their own flattering environment to join in a crusade for the general betterment. They fiddle while Rome burns, or they philosophize with an "Apres nous le deluge."

If the "best minds" in English have nothing to say publicly and with force about the inadequacy of vacuum-sealed English, who will be the spokesmen? We run the risk as a nation, when the present generation of researchers shall have passed on, of having, because of the abandonment of fundamentals by the overwhelming majority, to rediscover our language integrity.

A. M. Withers,
Concord State Teachers Coll.,
Athens, W. Va.

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## The Teaching of English Literature

Dear Editor:

Present trends which emphasize American cultural materials have given me an opportunity to offer, during the recent summer session, a course which I have contemplated for several years. Its reception by the class was more than gratifying. For want of a better name, I called it "The Development of American Thought in Art and Literature". As the course developed, a more apt title might have been simply "The Development of American Culture". Significant in the presentation of material was the emphasis upon unique American aspects of religion, theology, and philosophy, and upon the characteristically American qualities apparent in the arts today.

The outline which follows will suggest the material employed. The bulk of the course is contained in III,B.

I. Introduction.
  A Culture defined.
  B American culture limited: The Anglo-Saxon tradition, The Classical tradition, The Christian tradition, Minor cultural impulses — Racial, Economic, Geographic.

11 Backgrounds.
  A Racial:
  Indian, Spanish, French, English, Scotch-Irish, Swedish, Dutch, Negro, Later immigrations.
  B Economic:
  Discovery and exploration, Trade, Colonization — New England, Middle settlements, Southern, French and Spanish contacts, Frontier.
  C Geography:
  New England, Middle area, South, Canada and Florida-Mexico, Frontier.

III Summary.
  A Relative values in shaping culture:
  Racial (English), Economic-geographic — New England, Virginia, Frontier.
  B Cultural development in terms of Religion, Philosophy, Science, Education, Esthetics.

Two major tasks were assigned to students: the development of a history of the art which appealed to them; a thorough examination of the life and work of an important figure in that field of art. Incidental class reports were made by students on particular religious sects, schools of philosophy, educational methods, cultural movements. Greatest interest was apparent in the history of various American church groups and in the modern movements in painting, music, architecture and literature.

Our winter work with Freshmen will emphasize American materials for readings. We are adding an elective course for upperclassmen in Latin-American literature and culture.

James M. Miller,
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